

Divine Puzzles

Text: Matthew 6:33 (Jerusalem Bible) "Set your hearts on His kingdom first, and on His righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well."

This morning we are going to depart from the usual type of sermon. The first part of the sermon will be involved with a short biography of my life. My reason for this is twofold. Whenever a new pastor comes to a congregation, people usually want to know about him. They wonder where he comes from and all about him, so this should answer most questions in this respect. My second reason is to show what has molded my thinking and my beliefs and to give you an insight into just what it is that has brought me to be here as your pastor.

~~My~~ ^{LINK THE CHAIN} story begins on a day in April of 1929 in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. I was the last ^{FROM MY MOTHER} of five children. Four boys and one girl. I suppose we could say that I was raised in a lower ~~than~~ middle class family. My father never held a steady job from 1929 to 1936, so we knew what the depression was all about. I started Sunday school in my home church of St Paul's on Pittsburgh's north side at the age of ten. My mother is a very religious woman and my father we could say was semi religious, so I had a fairly good background of the Bible and the essence of religion. ^{FROM MY MOTHER} I had a deep interest in the Bible and of religion so much so, that I excelled as the best student of fifteen in my confirmation class. In those days we had what was called question Sunday and the confirmands had to answer questions put to them in front of their parents and members of the congregation. The pastor proposed that one member of the class be selected to represent the class and they selected me. But this idea fell through as the pastor thought it best that each boy or girl answer for themselves. This is one point in my life where I feel a little guidance from my pastor could have started me in the direction of the ministry much sooner. I believe very strongly that many young men are lost to the ministry because of an indifference from pastors toward young men who are religiously inclined. As a result I have resolved to try to help any young boys who perhaps show an inclination toward the ministry. But as a result of not knowing the proper subjects to take in school and not having the guidance or the motivation to further my education I graduated from school, just taking what was absolutely essential to get through, I went to work in a Catholic book store owned by one of our neighbors. I was drafted into the army and ^{WHILE THERE} had several experiences that had a very definite effect on my life. First of all when I graduated from basic training my training company was divided as to where we were sent. From the letter A to the letter J went to Alaska and from the letter K to the letter Z went to Korea. This was in 1951 when the Korean war was on. Because I had made high grades on my tests I had the option to go to leadership training school which was a six weeks course and so I elected to

do this. But before I did this I also knew that it automatically made the man eligible for a ticket straight to Korea with no side trips in between. ^{So IN ANY EVENT I KNEW I WOULD GO TO Korea} This was on my mind the entire six weeks and when I graduated from this course, we had several days in which to get all our gear in order and then we came home for two weeks, and then went to Seattle for the trip overseas. It was during these several days of getting things in order before coming home that the awareness of the gravity of the situation in Korea really struck me. I was worried about it because I knew there was a good possibility that I might not come back home again. It is the same situation many of you men here faced in World War II and what the young men are facing in Viet Nam today. It bothered me so much that I did not sleep too well and I thought about it constantly. The night before I came home on furlough I had a very fitful nights sleep until about three o'clock in the morning. I awakened somewhat startled as though someone had shaken me to arouse me. The barracks were completely quiet except for the heavy breathing of some men and the snoring of others. When I awoke I heard a voice as clear and as direct as I have ever heard. All the voice said was, "Everything is going to be alright." I called out but no one answered. All was quiet. The only thing I can say is that it was a part of God's plan. I do not know whether it was God or what it was and further more I frankly do not know the origin or the meaning of it. All I do know is that from then on my outlook became clearer and I never had the fear or the worry about my coming back alive again. My fears were allayed to the extent that I came home on furlough and married my sweetheart of three years and spent five wonderful days with her before leaving for Seattle.

It was also while I was in Korea that I knew my Father was watching over me and that he must have had a purpose for my life. On three separate occasions I narrowly missed being hit by bullets and shrapnel. It was these occasions that made me very keenly aware that I could have been killed just as easily as I was spared. It made me begin to look at life more closely and wonder about the purpose of it. I talked to several of the chaplains about the ministry but they were of no help. When I returned home I was released from the service and went in business with my brother. This lasted about a year and we parted. It was here that I decided to enter the ministry. I applied at the university of Pittsburgh and was accepted. I was to start in September. But at the end of August we learned Shirley was pregnant and we both felt it would be too much of a hardship for me to go to school and work and so we decided to let this pass. I worked as a grocery store clerk and then was employed by my brother in his ceramic tile business and then went to work as a stationary engineer in an office building in Pittsburgh. It was here that I had another experience that changed my life. At the time we had debts and illness and things were at their worst. Everything we seemed to do went wrong and we were both disgusted and frustrated. I was working 4 to 12 and this particular day when I was driving into Pittsburgh from Butler, my mind began to focus on the fact that I had to do something to

the things that loomed so large were not that important anymore and we found that God had more of a place in our lives. Shortly after this my brother gave up his business and I took it over and ran it as my own. While we were going through this frustrating time we were still members of a church. In fact we had joined the Presbyterian church in the neighborhood when we moved from Pittsburgh to Butler. So it was not that we were without religion. But shortly after this the Lay Ministry program came into being in our conference. In order to become a part of it we joined a United Church of Christ nearby and I began a course of study and service. During my course of study I became the Lay Minister of a two church charge very similar to this one. I gave my weekends to this ministry and some of my evenings and whatever time I could give. The entire family entered into this too I should add. It was when they had been able to get a pastor and my two years of service were coming to an end that I discovered that the ministry

was where I belonged and where I wanted to be. I think I only found myself while
 FOR IT ALWAYS SEEMED AS THOUGH GOD HAD HIS HAND IN MY SHOULDER &
 serving God in this capacity. This then is the brief story of why I am here and
 KEPT POINTING ME TO THE MINISTRY
 what my feelings and my thinking are. If you will forgive my comparison with
 Martin Luther when I say that I feel as he must of felt when he stood before the
 Council of Worms and when asked to recant he said, "Here I stand, I can do no
 else, so help me God." EXAMPLE OF BEING LAID OFF & OTHER PIECES
 FITTING IN PLACE.

Now what I have been trying to say is not merely a relating of my life, but a demonstration to you that I firmly believe that God still works today in the lives of common ordinary people. When I read in the Bible where men heard the voice of God I believe it. Because I believe that He spoke to me once and He spoke in other ways too. When I read where a religious man such as David slipped and actually scraped bottom in his sins I can believe this, because I know that I was a steady church goer and yet my life was not what it should have been. And so I have been trying to point out that if we each look at our lives

we could compare them to a graph such as business does. we could see that they reached a certain peak and then ~~went~~^{PLP} into a valley and so on down the years. We hit highs and lows. At times we are close to the mark and at others we are far away. But as I look back I can see where each experience and each event in my life has sort of fit into a certain spot. It is something like a large jigsaw puzzle and God is working it. He has all the pieces and as we live the life He fits them all into place. I think sometimes that perhaps I may have entered the ministry as a much younger man, and yet I feel that at that point I was not mature enough. I believe that each day almost has been a part of God's purpose for me. I also believe that each one of us fits into this puzzle somewhere and somehow and we must keep on searching and keep on striving until we find our places in the divine puzzle. ~~I DO NOT BELIEVE WE JUST LIVE & DIE~~

Many times I have sung, whistled and repeated to myself the hymn we will close with this morning. ~~BUT EACH HAVE A DEFINITE PURPOSE.~~
~~1ST IN SCHOOL~~
 To me it has a special significance because I literally believe it to be true.

"He leadeth me O blessed thought, O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
 Whate'er I do, where'er I be, Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.
 Lord I would clasp Thy hand in mine, Nor ever murmur nor repine: Content whatever
 lot I see, since 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.
 And when my task on earth is done, When by Thy grace the victory's won, E'en
 deaths cold wave I will not flee Since God through Jordan leadeth me.
 He leadeth me, He leadeth me; by His own hand He leadeth me: His faithful follow-
 er I would be, for by His hand he leadeth me."

May we each take the words of this beloved hymn to our hearts and may they be for each of us our hymn of life as we live each day. I believe that God is still leading us and will continue to do so if we let Him. But we must surrender our lives to Him so that He can work His will in our lives and ~~may He touch our hearts this day to use us as He wills.~~
~~FIT US AS PIECES IN HIS DIVINE PUZZLE.~~
 Jesus set the example for us and He taught us to "Set your hearts on His kingdom first, and on His righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well." This we must do first and then all things fall in place in this part of God's Divine puzzle.